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HOUSEMAKERS' CHAT

Saturday, April 8, 1939

(For Broadcast Use Only)

Subject: "SPRING TONIC FOR THE LAWN." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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The urge to get out and dig comes on strong at this time of year like a symptom of spring fever. When the first warm bright days arrive, the man of the house is likely to remark that he thinks he'll go out and do something about the lawn. Of course, you know that fall is a far better time in most cases to work on the lawn. You know that weeds won't get a head start where the lawn is seeded in the fall as they do in the spring, and that cool damp fall days encourage the growth of grass. But you didn't do the work last fall probably you'd better let the lawn have some renovating now.

Anyone who is really serious about improving a lawn will want a Department-of-Agriculture Farmers Bulletin called "Planting and Care of Lawns" which is 1677. You can write to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for it. As long as the supply lasts, it is free for the asking. Once more: "Planting and Care of Lawns," Farmers' Bulletin 1677. That bulletin will tell you how to start a new lawn and how to care for an old one. It will tell you about drainage, grading, soil and seed. It will tell you about fertilizing, mowing, watering, weeding, and about the kind of grass to use in your part of the country.

While you are waiting for that bulletin, here are some tips from experts about helping the lawn in spring. If the lawn had no fertilizing last fall, do it early in the spring, though sometimes this tends to encourage crabgrass. You can try many special brands of lawn fertilizer, but these often cost more than ferti-

lizing ingredients and contain more phosphorus and potash than the grass needs and less nitrogen. Grass usually needs considerable nitrogen. So a fertilizer like sewage sludge, or a mixture of 3 parts of cottonseed meal and 1 part sulphate of ammonia may be cheaper and more satisfactory than a ready-prepared lawn fertilizer. Later in the spring, or early in the summer, if the lawn still seems to need nourishment, use some quick-acting fertilizer like ammonium sulphate or ammonium phosphate-- a light application so it won't burn the grass. About 3 pounds of such a fertilizer mixed with sifted soil and spread evenly over a thousand square feet of grass will do the job. Water the lawn thoroughly after applying the fertilizer.

In the spring top dressing also may help your lawn. Use a good compost mixed with equal parts of manure, sand, and heavy-textured topsoil. Or use mushroom soil, or good garden loam. If your ground is mostly clay, have a good deal of sand in this top dressing. If your ground is sandy, use more clay. Wherever you notice small pockets or bare places in the lawn caused by thawing and freezing in the winter, fill in with top dressing. By the way, of course, you will take care to use no soil or manure that contains weed seeds or you may find yourself with a crop of weeds and practically no grass.

What about adding lime to the lawn? Add it only when you find by an acidity test that your ground is acid or "sour." In most cases, lime used as top dressing has not been effective. Lime is not a fertilizer, you know. Even when you use lime, you also need to use fertilizer. Many times lime alone simply encourages weeds.

Now about rolling your lawn. In most parts of the country the winter freezing and thawing pushes grass out of the soil. So roll the lawn early in the spring when the soil is not too moist. This will push the plants back into position where they can grow to best advantage.

Grass suffers in hot dry weather. So as the hot days come on, watering is important. Grass needs thorough but not too frequent watering. If you just sprin-
kle your lawn each day, as so many people do, your grass will grow shallow roots rather than deep strong roots, and you will encourage the growth of crabgrass. In fact, grass experts will tell you that many a fine bluegrass lawn has been ruined by frequent light watering and too close cutting. So remember to water the ground well but not too often. Grass beneath or near trees needs more water than grass growing in the open. Grass on south and west exposures which get the most sun also needs extra water. So does grass growing on slopes where the water runs off quickly.

Generally, you don't have to worry about cutting grass too often. Just be sure you don't cut it too close. Sudden exposure to the sun after grass has had had the shade of a dense growth is often harmful. Set your mower at least an inch and a half above the ground. Leave the clipped grass on the lawn unless it is too heavy or you dislike the appearance. Grass clippings help the turf.

The weed problem is eternal on every lawn. The best way to keep weeds down is to make conditions for the growth of grass so weeds will have little chance to get started. The most troublesome weeds are crabgrass, dandelion, plantain, and chickweed. Crabgrass is the worst. It starts as soon as the weather warms up and continues to spread until frost. To discourage crabgrass, don't mow too close--set your blade 2 inches high so the good grass can grow high and smother it, and water thoroughly now and then, and fertilize every fall. The only way to deal with dandelion and plantain is to dig them out by hand. Chickweed is a winter weed and comes in patches which you can cut out or destroy by dusting with ammonium sulphate. Moss on a lawn usually means that the soil needs fertilizing, or that there is poor drainage or too much shade. You can rake moss out or kill it with ammonium sulphate and then put grass seed in its place.

If you have bare, thin or very weedy spots in the lawn, better fork these up, fertilize the soil, seed and roll it. After that, fertilizer in the fall, mowing and watering will keep it in place.

Just one last point. Grass never keeps healthy with wet feet. In other words, if parts of your lawn are poorly drained so that water stands around the grass roots, you won't have a nice lawn. Such places need draining or filling in before the grass can grow well.

Once again, if you want all the details about lawns, remember Farmers' Bulletin No. 1677. It's free from the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

